

POWER LINE LIGHTS COULD BE OUT

■ Mayor says return \$750,000 worth of grant money for relocation of controversial wires

by **PHILLIP WOOLGAR**
Saint City News

City council voted in a slight majority Monday to continue deliberations on the future of a deadly set of power lines.

The lines stretch over a vast wetland in the western part of the city, a prime area for what has become flying prey.

Hundreds of birds are killed in mid-flight, blindsided by the often transparent lines, said several environmental committees.

AltaLink said they would pay \$450,000 for relocation, the province agreed to grant \$300,000 and the City would pay about \$450,000.

But after several councillors said the proposed location on Ray Gibbon Drive would interfere with aesthetics,

council looked to either bury the lines or hide them in an above ground path — approximately \$6.5 million more expensive than the \$1.1 million project that was already 70 per cent, or so, funded.

After a meeting on Monday Nov. 10 with the members of the provincial government, including Lloyd Snelgrove, president of the Alberta Treasury Board, council were denied funding for that option.

Jason Cooke, spokesperson for the Environmental Advisory Committee, warned council approximately two weeks prior to the meeting that the under or just above ground plan would be thrown out.

He said council would be “ill advised” to seek payment for burial, and the advisory

committee must “point out the misunderstanding.”

Now, council is expected to make a decision whether to come up with money for a plan during budget deliberations this month.

“Staff have looked at several locations [to put the lines],” Coun. Carol Watamaniuk said. “I get the feeling council was totally wrapped with location. Couldn’t the location be varied a bit to make it more digestible?”

Bill Holtby, city manager, said the plans are very preliminary and council would be consulted prior to reconstruction.

Holtby said there could be several grants available to cover some of the City’s portion.

“The only challenge I see with that is that the province has already given \$300,000,”

he said. “Often from the provincial government you can’t get more than 50 per cent of funding.”

The original plan, which council has been encouraged by scientists and environmentalists to support, would put the power lines on Ray Gibbon Drive, 650 metres away from the wetland.

Several environmental groups, armed with scientists came up with the relocation plans. AltaLink, which operates the lines, decided that option three would work best because of the costs and the location.

Several councillors disapproved of that location because the power poles would be too close to Ray Gibbon Drive and to the St. Albert Soccer Association pitches.

But according to Leah

Jackson, director of the City’s office of the environment, if all impacts were put into one area, wildlife would be deterred.

“I don’t support this option,” Coun. Len Bracko said. “After talking to people down there, I think [moving the lines] would make it worse.”

He said a new location would only be a different striking-point for the lines, possibly killing more birds.

“It would be a waste of tax dollars,” he said.

According to Bracko, he has spoken to many experts and they say there is no benefit to moving the lines.

But according to Watamaniuk, scientists have said the new location is the all around best option.

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Various options

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“AltaLink is so convinced it should be moved, they are willing to put lots of money into it,” she said.

“To say that experts haven’t looked into this baffles me. We could have an opportunity for a real historic moment here. Let’s at least take it to the budget process.”

Watamaniuk put forward a motion that all future discussion on the power lines focus on option three.

That motion was voted down 5 — 2 with Coun. Lorie Garrity and Watamaniuk approving.

Councillors Roger Lemieux and Bracko, and Mayor Nolan Crouse voted against continuing discussions altogether.

On Tuesday Crouse put forward a motion to take the topic off the agenda.

“I’m not sure we have the cash,” he said.

“I move that the funds from AltaLink and the provincial government be given back to the parties and otherwise declined.”

Crouse said a \$350,000 contribution from the city would result in an approximate 0.75 per cent tax increase on an already controversial 8.97 per cent proposed tax hike for 2009.

Conversely, according to Holtby, each \$60,000 increase in expenses equals 0.1 per cent increase to taxes, and the requirement from the city would actually be approximately \$450,000 if no other grants are found.